

## Book review: A war of images. By Stephen M. Norris. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press 2006. ISBN 0-87580-363-6

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**Domestic mandala: architecture of lifeworlds in Nepal.** By J. Gray. Aldershot: Ashgate. 2006. xvi + 163 pp. £45.00 hardback. ISBN 0 754 645 38 X

*Domestic Mandala*, part of a series linking anthropological theory, cultural history and religious studies, focuses on the cosmological significance of houses (traditional and modern) in the Kholagaun hamlet in the village of Banaspati, Kathmandu. The concept of homology is central to the discussion: the human body relates to the house as the house relates to the cosmos.

The different spatial modalities of the house demonstrate this: the mandalic (concentric spaces around a centre) and yantric (cardinal directions and auspicious rituals) are underpinned by the foundational myth of Purusha, the cosmic being integral to sacred geometry.

Does Gray show that this system or philosophy is a conscious way of being for people, rather than an external construct imposed by the anthropologist? Utilizing excerpts and producing vignettes from fieldnotes, Gray reveals that the householders self-identify as having a lifestyle defined by dharma (which itself articulates the relation between an individual's stage of life and worldly duty). Particularly interesting is the analysis of marriage rites which, it is argued, are ritual as performance.

Indeed the notion of an embodied way of knowing is crucial to the argument that truth is made manifest through paradoxical attachment and detachment. That is, the process of building, the configuration of the built form, and everyday domestic activities are revelatory.

Gray highlights the importance of boundaries to Nepalese thinking, and ideas of purity and impurity are key here. Disembodied ghosts haunt liminal spaces, while women external to the family might be perceived as a potential threat to the house. Moreover, conceptions of pure and impure affect everyday rituals such as the preparation of rice, in terms of physical location and participants.

Ultimately, Gray is concerned with how to express, in an analytic ethnography, what he terms the 'lifeworld', the unspoken dimension of social life.

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**A war of images.** By Stephen M. Norris. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press. 2006. 291 pp. \$40.00. cloth. ISBN: 0-87580-363-6.

This interesting monograph explores what the author calls 'Russian visual nationhood.' Specifically, it is a study of how *lubok* illustrations (cheap and colorful bastwood prints long popular among Russia's lower classes) depicted – and propagandized for – Russian military campaigns, from the Napoleonic invasion of 1812 down to the Second World War. Challenging arguments of Geoffrey Hosking and others that a sense of nationhood in Russia was traditionally only weakly developed, or indeed absent altogether, Norris insists that the articulation of identity was a constant and pervasive process. His point is well taken and certainly well demonstrated, although given the intensely patriotic nature of the evidence he considers one could hardly have expected differently. He traces how the iconography of

Fatherland representation shifted over the 19th century, with the image of the *tsar-batiushka* or tsar-father becoming less important while the image of the sturdy and diligent peasant remained ever stable. The discussion of how *lubok* illustrations survived the revolution of 1917 to prosper as an effective means of political propaganda and popular mobilization in the USSR is particularly fascinating. As part of this, we gain a glimpse into the little-known aspects of the *oeuvre* of cultural giants such as Vladimir Mayakovsky and Kazimir Malevich, namely their careers as humble *lubok* illustrators. Overall, the book provides fascinating insight into how national identity was represented and perceived on the lowest levels of society, among a population that was for the most part illiterate. At the same time, however, the imagery it discusses is striking for the absence of a concern with landscape as a defining parameter for national identification. As Chris Ely's recent *This meager nature* demonstrates, landscape was a vital element in the elaboration of Russianness for the 'high' culture of Russian art and poetry. Perhaps a follow-up study, examining *lubki* pictures that are not related to war themes, would reveal a similar engagement with the geography of nationhood.

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**By northern lights: on the making of geography in Sweden.** By Anne Buttimer and Tom Mels. Basingstoke: Ashgate. 2006. 214pp. £xx cloth. ISBN: 0-7546-4814-1 cloth.

This book follows on conceptually and in subject matter from Buttimer's *Geography and the human spirit* (1993) and *Geographers of Norden* (1988) co-edited with Torsten Hagerstrand. The volume explores the making of Swedish geography, emphasizing geography as socially constructed knowledges. Although principally an analysis of the historical development of Geography in Sweden, *By northern Lights* draws on the interviews of the International Dialogue Project 1978–88, notably in the interview with Hagerstrand constituting Chapter Six. This interview, in the spirit of the Dialogue Project brings the (albeit still mediated) personal–professional voice of the geographer rather than their authorial or pedagogic voice to the history of geography. Buttimer brought oral history to the history of geography, long before it was fashionable, and this tradition is continued here. Many will find insight to Hagerstrand's work through this interview and it provides a useful resource in teaching the development of geographical thought – as does the whole book. The exploration of personal life-careers through biography (such as those of Edgar Kant, W. William-Olsson and Gerd Enquist) is a rich vein running throughout the text, linked in turn to wider intellectual, social and political milieu within and beyond geography.

Conceptually, changes in the history of Swedish geography are explained using Buttimer's threefold conceptual frameworks of meaning, metaphor and milieu and phoenix, faust and narcissus. Although explained here, a reader unfamiliar with these ideas may find it helpful to read Buttimer's earlier work first. However, once grasped, these analytical frameworks are applied to effect in this volume in the nuanced exploration of institutional and individual accounts of geography (although the poor text quality on some of the tables mapping these different elements is unfortunate). Buttimer and Mels provide the historian of geographical ideas and practices with a rich source of contextual studies at an institutional and national